

PITTSFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

ANTI-BULLYING/PEER HARASSMENT (? Exploring whether or not to keep combined or to separate out Peer Harassment)

POLICY

It is the intent of the Pittsfield Public Schools to provide all students with an equitable opportunity to learn. To that end, Pittsfield Public Schools has a significant interest in providing a safe, supportive, orderly and respectful school environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Pittsfield Public Schools takes a systematic approach to bullying and/or peer harassment prevention and intervention. Anti-bullying and peer harassment prevention in the Pittsfield Public schools is embedded within broader school-wide approaches that promote a positive, prosocial culture for all students and staff, particularly the District School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support initiative, the Olweus Anti-Bullying Program and the implementation of school violence prevention curriculums. (?--should I end last sentence after staff)

Bullying and/or peer harassment is detrimental to student learning and achievement. It interferes with the mission of the schools to educate their students and disrupts the operations of the schools. Bullying and/or peer harassment negatively affects not only students who are targets but also the aggressors and those who participate and witness such behavior.

It is not the Pittsfield Public Schools' intent to prohibit students from expressing their ideas, including ideas that may offend the sensibilities of others, or from engaging in civil debate. However, the Pittsfield Public Schools does not condone and will take action in response to conduct that creates a hostile environment and interferes with students' opportunity to learn.

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REGULATIONS

A. Bullying and/or Peer Harassment Prohibited

Bullying and/or peer harassment, as defined in this policy, is not acceptable conduct in Pittsfield Public Schools and is prohibited. Any student who engages in conduct that constitutes bullying and/or peer harassment shall be subject to disciplinary consequences up to and including suspension or expulsion in accordance with the student handbook. A student's bullying and/or peer harassment behavior may also be addressed through other behavioral interventions. (? Add back termination of employee statement from below. Is this true or should it say something about progressive disciplinary action.)

Bullying and/or peer harassment of any type has no place in a school setting. The Pittsfield Public Schools will endeavor to maintain learning and working environments free of bullying and/or peer harassment.

Retaliation against a person who either reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information is further prohibited.

The School Committee expects administrators and supervisors to make clear to students and staff that bullying and/or peer harassment is prohibited. This prohibition includes the following areas:

- in the school building and on school grounds.
- on property immediately adjacent to school grounds.

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- at a bus stop, on the school bus or other school sanctioned transportation, such as another vehicle owned, leased, or used by a school district,
- at a school-sponsored or school related activity, function, or program whether it takes place on or off school grounds,
- Through the use of technology or an electronic device that is owned, leased or used by the school district or school,
- At any program or location that is not school-related, or through the use of personal technology or electronic device, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the target, infringes on the rights of the target at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school,

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Deleted: The District will promptly and reasonably investigate allegations of peer harassment, including bullying. The Principal of each building will be responsible for handling all complaints by students alleging peer harassment, including bullying.

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Deleted: Administrative guidelines and procedures for all forms of bullying and/or peer harassment will apply as outlined in the student handbook. The Pittsfield Public Schools use curriculum and professional development to support the implementation of this policy, and develop early pro-active interventions for the bully/harasser, victim, and the entire school community.

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1. . Physically, mentally, and/or emotionally harming a student or damaging a student's property;
2. . Placing a student in reasonable fear of physical harm or damage to his/her property; or
3. . Substantially disrupting the instructional program or the orderly operations of the school; or
4. . Is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, hostile educational environment for the student who is bullied.

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B. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions will be used:

Bullying: The repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property; places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself/herself or of damage to his/her property; creates a hostile environment at school for the target, infringes on the rights of the target at school; or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. Bullying includes cyberbullying. (Definition based on M.G.L. c.71, 370)

Cyberbullying: Bullying through the use of technology or any electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages and Internet postings.

Aggressor: A student who engages in bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation.

Target: A student against whom bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation is directed.

Hostile Environment: A situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the student's education.

C. Definition Peer Harassment (? Do we keep)

For the purpose of this policy, "peer harassment" means conduct of a verbal or physical nature that is designed to embarrass, distress, agitate, disturb, or trouble students. Peer harassment includes, but is not limited to, verbal, physical, written, or electronically communicated harassment or abuse; repeated remarks of a demeaning nature; and demeaning jokes, stories, or activities directed at the student.

D. Application of Policy

This policy applies to bullying and/or peer harassment that takes place at school or on school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity or event, or while students are being transported to or from school or school-sponsored activities or events. It also applies to bullying and/or peer harassment that occurs at any other time or place that substantially disrupts the instructional program, operations of the school, or welfare of students (e.g., harassing text messages that are sent beyond the school day, which substantially disrupt the instructional program).

Examples of conduct that may constitute bullying and/or peer harassment include, but are not limited to:

1. Physical contact or injury to another person or his/her property;
2. Threats of harm to a student, to his/her possessions, or to other individuals, whether transmitted verbally, in writing, or through electronic or other means;
3. Blackmail, extortion, demands for protection money, or involuntary loans or donations;
4. Non-verbal threats and/or intimidations such as use of aggressive or menacing gestures;
5. Stalking;
6. Blocking access to school property or facilities;
7. Stealing or hiding books, backpacks, or other possessions;
8. Repeated or pervasive taunting, name-calling, belittling, mocking, put-downs, or demeaning humor relating to a student's race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ancestry, religion, disability, or other personal characteristics, whether or not the student actually possesses them, that could reasonably be expected to result in disruption of the instructional program or operations of the schools, or that results in a hostile educational environment for the student; and
9. Any form of cyber-bullying or peer harassment communicated through electronic means (e.g., text messaging, blogging, social networking, etc.).

The determination whether particular conduct constitutes bullying and/or peer harassment requires reasonable consideration of the circumstances, which include the frequency of the behavior at issue, the location in which the behavior occurs, the ages and maturity of the students involved, the activity or context in which the conduct occurs, and the nature and severity of the conduct.

E. Delegation of Responsibility

The Superintendent or his/her designee will be responsible for developing and implementing procedures for:

1. Student and parent reporting of bullying and/or peer harassment to staff and school administrators;
2. Staff reporting of bullying and/or peer harassment to school administrators;
3. Review of reports and investigation of bullying and/or peer harassment incidents;
4. Intervention with and/or discipline of students who engage in bullying and/or peer harassment;
5. Support for students who are victims of bullying and/or peer harassment;
6. Annual professional development of staff and students in identification, reporting, prevention and appropriate responses to bullying and/or peer harassment; and 7. Periodic evaluation of bullying and/or peer harassment prevention, intervention, and training procedures.

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F. Reporting

Anyone, including a parent, guardian, student or school staff member, can report bullying or retaliation. Reports can be made in writing or orally. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing. Persons other than school or district staff can make reports anonymously. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

Students who have been or parents of students who have been bullied and/or harassed, or who observe incidents of bullying and/or peer harassment are encouraged to report this behavior to a staff member or school administrator.

Staff should immediately report bullying and/or peer harassment to the building principal if they either witness or become aware of bullying or retaliation in another manner. Staff members responsible for reporting acts of bullying include, but are not limited, to the following: educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessionals.

Acts of reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an incident of bullying and/or peer harassment are prohibited. Any student who is determined to have falsely accused another of bullying and/or peer harassment shall be subject to disciplinary consequences in accordance with the student handbook.

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Responding to Bullying and Peer Harassment

The District will promptly and reasonably investigate allegations of peer harassment, including bullying. The Principal of each building or his/her designee(s) will be responsible for handling all complaints by students alleging peer harassment, including bullying.

Any school staff that witnesses bullying should immediately intervene and stop the bullying and/or peer harassment.

When the school principal or his/her designee(s) receives a report of bullying/peer harassment, he or she shall promptly conduct an investigation. If there is a determination that bullying has occurred, he/she shall:

- Notify the parents or guardians of the target, and to the extent consistent with state and federal law, notify them of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation.
- Notify the parents or guardians of the aggressor(s)
- Take appropriate disciplinary action.
- Notify the local law enforcement agency if there is reason to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor. In making this determination, the administrator may consult with the School Resource Officer or other individuals deemed necessary.

During the course of investigation, the school principal and/or his/her designee will assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents, including the possible completion of a personal safety plan.

In determining the appropriate response to students who engage in bullying and/or peer harassment behavior, school administrators should consider the ages and maturity of the students involved, the type of behaviors, the frequency and/or pattern of behaviors, the context in which the incident occurred, and other relevant circumstances. Responses can include positive behavioral interventions, teaching appropriate behavior through skill-building, disciplinary action including suspension or expulsion in accordance with the student handbook and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and/or reports to law enforcement officials.

Administrative guidelines and procedures for all forms of bullying and/or peer harassment will apply as outlined in the student handbook. The **Error! Contact not defined.** professional development to support the implementation of this policy, as well as implements curriculum to develop early proactive interventions for the aggressor/harasser, target, and the entire school community.

H. Dissemination of Policy

Notice of what constitutes bullying and/or peer harassment, Pittsfield Public Schools' prohibition against bullying and/or peer harassment, and the consequences for students who bully and/or harass shall be communicated to students and parents through the Student Code of Conduct and Student Handbook. In addition, staff will receive annual training on the identification, reporting, prevention and response to bullying.

REFERENCES

STU-3 (Equal Educational Opportunities); Policy Handbook for Parents and Students
Policy Handbook for Parents and Students

STU-34 (Hazing); Policy Handbook for Parents and Students

STU-24 (Student Rights and Responsibilities); Policy Handbook for Parents and Students

STU-31 (Student Conduct on Buses); Policy Handbook for Parents and Students

STU-38 (Secure School Environment); Policy Handbook for Parents and Students

STU-65 ((Student Safety); Policy Handbook for Parents and Students

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STU-28 (Student Conduct – Conduct/Discipline/Suspension/Expulsion); Policy Handbook for Parents and Students